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AUTHOR Fayer, Joan M.
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ABSTRACT

The writing apprehension experienced by Puerto Rican university students is examined. Levels of apprehension when writing in English versus native Spanish, for males versus females, and for students enrolled or not enrolled in writing classes are compared. The results indicate that the students, particularly the women, are more apprehensive when writing in the second language. Students in writing classes reported less apprehension. The levels of writing apprehension in English were found to be lower than the levels of communication apprehension in English reported in earlier studies. (Author/MSE)

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WRITING APPREHENSION AMONG PUERTO RICAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Joan M. Fayer

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Joan M. Fayer
University of Puerto Rico

Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Convention
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Writing Apprehension Among Puerto Rican University Students

This study examined the writing apprehension experienced by students in first and second languages. Analysis of data indicates these students were more apprehensive writing in a second language. Students in writing classes reported less apprehension. Means of writing apprehension in English were lower than the means of communication apprehension in English reported in earlier studies.

Writing apprehension described as "an individual difference characterized by a general avoidance of writing and situations perceived by the individual to potentially require some amount of writing accompanied by the potential for evaluation of that writing " (Daly 1979:37) is seen as a multidimensional construct that does not depend soley on writing proficiency. The individual must find some value in writing and/or want to write (Daly 1985:45). One of the primary methods of assessing writing apprehension, a 26 item self report instrument developed by Daly and Miller (1975), has been found to be reliable (Daly 1985:47). This instrument has been used extensively with native English speaking college students in the United States, but little if any quantitative research has been done with non-native English speakers. However, in the world today there are now more

non-native English speakers than native speakers (U.S. News and World Report, Feb. 18, 1985;49). English is a language used around the world both in spoken and written forms. The oral communication apprehension experienced by these non-native speakers in the United States and world-wide has been analyzed in various contexts. Although much more research is needed, the results to date indicate that members of some cultures experience more communication apprehension than members of other cultures and that more apprehension is experienced when speaking a second language than when speaking a native language (Klopf and Cambra 1979, Bruneau, Cambra and Klopf 1980, Jain, Kanungo and Goldhaber 1980, Klopf and Cambra 1980, Allen and Andriate 1984, McCroskey 1985, etc).

One of the areas in which English is a second language for a large percentage of the population is Puerto Rico, a commonwealth associated with the United States. In Puerto Rico English is a required subject in school from first to twelfth grade and for two years in college. There are many functions for both written and spoken Engish on the island. The investigation of communication apprehension experienced by Puerto Rican college students found that these students were low apprehensives when they speak Spanish and high apprehensives when they speak English (Fayer, McCroskey, and Richmond, 1984; McCroskey, Fayer and Richmond, 1985).

Because there was no data on the writing apprehension experienced by Puerto Rican students, the current study was

undertaken. The following research questions were examined.

Q1: Are Puerto Rican college students more apprehensive when they write in English than in Spanish?

Q2: Is there a difference between the levels of writing apprehension experienced by males and females?

Q3: Are students enrolled in English writing classes more apprehensive than those in non-writing classes.?

METHOD

In the 1985-86 school year, the 26 item Daly and Miller questionnaire was administered to students at the University of Puerto Rico in English writing classes (N=96) and students in English classes in which writing was not emphasized (N=81). The mean scores can range from a high of 130 to a low of 26. Students are not usually required to take a writing class, so unless there were scheduling problems, insistent advisors, etc. these students chose to take a writing class. The students were asked to complete the instrument first answering "When I write in Spanish" and then "When I write in English." The instrument was not translated into Spanish because students in these classes were proficient in reading English.

The data was compared to that previously obtained in a study of communication apprehension among Puerto Rican college students (Fayer, McCroskey and Richmond 1984; McCroskey, Fayer and Richmond 1985).

RESULTS

The mean score for writing apprehension in Spanish was six points lower than the mean writing apprehension score in English indicating that students were more apprehensive in writing a second language. The mean score for males in English and Spanish was the same. For females the writing apprehension mean scores for writing in Spanish was five points lower.

The percentage of students at various writing apprehension levels is found in Table 1 below. Low writing apprehension was one standard deviation below the mean and high one standard deviation above the mean.

Insert Table 1 about here
(see p. 11)

In general, there was a lower percentage of females than males in the high apprehensive category in English and Spanish. In English there was a higher percentage of males than females in the low apprehensive category and higher in the high category in Spanish. However, all these differences were small. In both English and Spanish most males and females were in the moderate category.

Students rated their writing proficiency in Spanish significantly higher than their writing proficiency in English. Students in English writing classes rated their English writing proficiency higher than those in non-writing classes ($p < .02$). In addition, there were other significant differences between students in these classes. Those in writing classes enjoyed writing, found writing fun, liked seeing their ideas on paper, expected to do well in composition classes, didn't find composition courses frightening, and were not afraid of evaluation. Handing in a composition made them feel good, and they did not feel that writing down ideas was a waste of time (A chi square analysis of each of the above $p < .05$).

DISCUSSION

Students reported that their writing skills in Spanish were better than in English. There were slight differences in the levels of apprehenion experienced by women and men. Students were more apprehensive writing in a second language; however, most of the students fell into the category of moderate apprehension. These results can be compared to the communication apprehension scores of the college students in Puerto Rico. Data for communication apprehension was taken from the second sample of McCroskey, Fayer and Richmond (1985:189).

Insert Table 2 about here
(see p.11)

From this it can be seen that students in Puerto were very apprehensive about speaking English but not very apprehensive about writing it. They were only slightly more apprehensive writing English than they were speaking Spanish. Their self-rating of proficiency in writing Spanish was higher than their self-rating of English, indicating that they did not think their writing skills in the two languages were equal, but this did cause high levels of apprehension.

There may be several reasons why students in Puerto Rico are terrified to speak English and not so frightened to write English. One is probably the nature of speaking and writing. Oral communication is usually face to face with another person or persons, does not allow much time for planning or correction. When many second language speakers talk, there may be errors of various kinds. Miscommunication may result. This is all done in the presence of another person or persons. Most writing is of a different nature; it is planned discourse. Usually it is done for a person or persons who are not present with time for planning and correction. It is often possible to consult a dictionary, grammar, or even other people. Miscommunication may also result, but evaluation is not immediate and is usually not face-to-face. Writing may be more permanent, but the interaction between the

writer and the reader is not usually as direct as between the speaker and the listener. Thus the differences between speaking and writing probably account for some of the differences in the levels of communication apprehension and writing apprehension experienced by these students when they speak and write English.

Another reason may be the cultural patterns in Puerto Rico. Presentation of self is very important. In speaking, there is immediate evaluation, and the evaluation may not be positive. Writing skills may or may not be good, but they are not usually subject to face-to-face evaluation. The assessment is less immediate and more indirect. The English language curricula in Puerto Rico may also help to explain why the level of writing apprehension is lower than communication apprehension. More emphasis is often given to reading and writing English than using oral English in meaningful ways. Students may have had more experience using the written form of English than the spoken form.

The differences reported by students in the writing and non-writing classes may be due to a combination of better proficiency and/or better attitudes. Writing English was more enjoyable for students in writing classes. The more apprehensive students do not take writing classes. Sex differences in levels of apprehension were small and require additional investigation. As the number of non-native English speakers increases in the United States and world-wide, research is needed to determine the apprehension, both written and oral, experienced by who use

English as a second or foreign language as well as the effects of apprehension on the process of language acquisition. The present study analyzed the apprehension experienced by students in one of these contexts.

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Table 1

Percentage of Subjects at Various Writing Apprehension Levels

	Low	Moderate	High
Spanish			
Males	.16	.63	.22
Females	.18	.68	.14
	.17	.67	.16
English			
Males	.20	.61	.19
Females	.14	.72	.14
	.16	.67	.17

Table 2

Comparison of Percentages of Subjects at Various Levels of Communication Apprehension and Writing Apprehension

	Low	Moderate	High
Spanish			
Communication Apprehension	.28	.61	.12
Writing Apprehension	.17	.68	.14
English			
Communication Apprehension	.11	.46	.43
Writing Apprehension	.16	.67	.17